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ISETAN CHIEF

ISETAN'S CHIEF IMPRESSED WITH DR MAHATHIR'S EFFORTS TO HELP COUNTRY

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- Kazumasa Koshiba, the head of a giant Japanese department store chain, says he is impressed with the measures taken by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad towards reviving the country's economy.

Having met Dr Mahathir here today, the President of Isetan Co Ltd, said it demonstrated that the prime minister really cared about his own country.

The just-introduced exchange controls, for example, showed that Dr Mahathir was doing everything that he could for the country, he said.

"I really feel that after meeting him in person, Malaysians are very lucky to have him as prime minister," he told Bernama after the opening of the Japan Department Stores Association (JDSA) convention by Dr Mahathir here.

In Washington, a Japanese finance ministry official who attended the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank annual meetings has described Malaysia's exchange controls as "facing reality."

In defending Malaysia's exchange controls policy, he said some developing countries may need protection against speculative money flows.

Koshiba is the chairman of the association which groups 137 companies with 292 stores worldwide. The total overseas investment undertaken by its members amounted to US\$37 million last year of which 24 percent or US\$9 million was invested in Malaysia.

Asked about further investment by the association members in Malaysia, he said he was not aware of any specific plan at the moment.

"But I think in the future, including Isetan ourselves, if there is anything that we can be of help, we would be glad to. I'm sure there are other members considering to operate here in Malaysia," he said through an interpreter.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir hoped that the association would encourage its members to invest further by setting up more businesses in Malaysia.

He commended Isetan for its decision to open its store at KLCC Suria -- Kuala Lumpur's latest shopping attraction located at the Petronas Towers -- taking up five levels with a floor space of 250,000 sq ft.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia was grateful giant Japanese department stores operating in the country like Jusco, Isetan and Sogo as well as speciality stores such as Kinokuniya, Maruzen Nihonbashi and Mori-Toys have set-up joint-venture businesses here.

To a question, Koshiba said he was very happy with Isetan's operations here.

"When investing in any country, the company would look into basics like return on investment," he said.

Asked on a suggestion by Dr Mahathir that the association should increase local sourcing to reduce costs, Koshiba said this was being done by its members.

"We are always keeping our eyes open and looking at this closely although not in a big volume yet," he said.

Saying that Malaysian-made products were known for their high quality and competitive prices, Dr Mahathir had urged the association to source their supplies from Malaysia for their stores worldwide to remain competitive always.

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